
Yusneylys Guzmán and the triple Olympic battle

By: Harold Iglesias Manresa / CubaSi
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Yusneylys Guzmán “La Chiqui” (50 kg, women wrestling) is happily training at home, especially when she knows her Olympic ticket to Tokyo is already guaranteed. She has also the support of her family and her boyfriend, the recently retired wrestling star Franklin Maren, medalist in the freestyle wrestling in the 70 kg division.

But she experienced a scary story just two months ago while she was competing and (winning) her passport to Tokyo in Ottawa, Canada, along with Lienna de la Caridad Montero (53 kg) and Yudaris Sánchez (68 kg).

Back to Ottawa and with the coronavirus outbreak catching the world's attention, we had the chance to talk to “La Chiqui” and the rest of our women wrestling team in Canada — third country in America with the

largest number of infected people — as part of the last challenging tournament faced by the Cuban team before the pandemic dramatically unleashed...

How did you feel while competing in the qualification tournament knowing coronavirus was already a close threat?

“I was scared. We knew there were already a lot of confirmed cases of coronavirus in Canada. People were getting infected and killed.”

Did Canadians take any extra safety precaution?

“They thought to cancel the competition at first, but members of the organizing committee gathered and decided to isolate athletes.

Men’s Greco-Roman wrestlers were not allowed to be near women while competing and vice versa. Something similar occurred in the freestyle wrestling.

How did you face the tournament and what’s your opinion on your first Olympic Games qualification?

“Well, I can tell you I felt in a very good shape. I had trained hard to qualify for Tokyo but I was tense since my Olympic ticket depended on my result. I knew my opponents were tough to beat but I was confident on my qualification. It had been my dream since I was a little girl.”

In your view, who was your tougher rival and how did you help each other? Tell me about the trainers’ concern on coronavirus as well as the discipline outside the mat?

The toughest fight was against Colombia in the semifinals. WE helped each other as we were all focused on our goal. Our trainers, the men's trainers, all the team was always there backing us. We were all nervous because we knew the pandemic was killing people but we take all precautionary measures."

How did you communicate with Franklin in the distance those days?

"The communication is always very good with him. We talked to each other every day especially when one of the two is abroad. I have his unconditional support as he is my driving force, very demanding. He knows I have trained to win."

Did you spend fourteen days isolated once you got back home?

"Once I landed, a doctor checked my body temperature and I was told to check in at my polyclinic in my municipality. Then, we were ordered to stay at home for fourteen days with daily case-finding checks."

After the isolation period, what training plan are you following at home to maintain your shape? Which are the training exercises you are giving priority to?

"Well, I have been in touch with my trainer professor Filiberto Delgado "Puly." Via phone calls, he has pointed me out the main instructions to follow to maintain my shape as it is hard at home. Body movement exercises and the imitation of my favorite technique "the tackle" are the exercises I am giving top priority, as well as the partner workouts looking for strength."

So, Puly and the coaching staff are monitoring your workouts...

“Yes. They always call us to know about us, our family, if we are stick to the training plan, our health...”

What your most trusted technique?

The tackle to the left ankle as well as the tackle to the right leg, and then switch to the double leg tackle.”

Is it helpful to share your life with a former wrestler who, by the way, is world championship medalist?

“I am proud of him and it is helpful as we are both representing the same sports discipline. He understands me although he is very demanding with my performance.

I am grateful to him and the rest of my family. They are essential players in both my track record and my Olympic qualification. He helps me a lot in my technical development as he has had a lot of competitive experience. It is an honor to live by his side.

I love him and admire him very much as an athlete. And I love him very much as my boyfriend.”

Do you think it is fair to postpone the Olympic Games? In your case, would it affect your shape?

“I am ok with it. I have one more year to be at my best. I already have my Olympic passport and I only need to focus on my training. Other continents’ wrestlers have not fought in their respective qualifying tournament yet. Hence, it should be challenging for them. I believe it was the right call as there is nothing more important than the life of athletes.”

What would you advise the Cuban people in this situation?

Well, we are actually navigating through troubled waters because this pandemic is killing many people, including doctors who are risking their lives for our own safety. They are the true heroes. The only way we have to help them and somehow contribute to eradicate this coronavirus is to staying at home and complying with the precautionary measures set.”

And here ends the interview.

Isolation. Day X. Writing these lines has confirmed what I believed that Cubans have a supreme spirit to dealing with adversities. Yusneylys and each of our wrestlers competing in Ottawa proved me right.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
